

Goose Creek & Little River Navigation:
Clapham's Double Lock
Mouth of Goose Creek at Potomac River
Leesburg vicinity
Loudoun County
Virginia

HAER No. VA-39

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

GOOSE CREEK AND LITTLE RIVER NAVIGATION: DOUBLE LOCK
(CLAPHAM'S DOUBLE LOCK)

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Location: Mouth of Goose Creek at Potomac River, Leesburg
vicinity, Loudoun County, Virginia

USGS Quad Sterling, VA-MD; Universal Transverse
Mercator coordinates: 18.285270.4330640

Date of Construction: 1850

Engineers/Builder: General William Gibbs McNeill and J.H. Alexander,
engineers; James Roach of Alexandria, builder

Present Owner: Xerox Corporation, International Center for Training
and Management Development, PO Box 2000, Leesburg, VA
22075

Present Use: abandoned

Significance: The double lock at Clapham's Mill is the most
important structure on the Goose Creek and Little
River Navigation, a 20-mile river improvement project
chartered in 1832 and dissolved in 1857. The purpose
of the navigation was to provide lock-and-dam, or
slackwater, navigation to connect landlocked portions
of Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William counties in
Virginia with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal on the
eastern bank of the Potomac River in Maryland. Of the
nine locks, four canal sections and four dames
constructed as part of this improvement, Clapham's
Double Lock is the best preserved and one of the most
significant canal structures in the Commonwealth of
Virginia.

The double lock, composed of two joined chambers
approximately 50'4" x 11'9" each, lowered boats
approximately 18' in two stages down to the Potomac
River. Though constructed of dimensioned stone,
portions of the lock walls are collapsing.

Double locks are rare in canal construction and this
one is even more unusual because it has one pair of
redundant gates. The error is attributed to a change
of plans. Double locks usually operated by the lower
gates of one lock serving as the upper gates of the
other.

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Railroads were supplanting canals as major carriers by the time the Goose Creek and Little River Navigation neared completion in the early 1850s. One boat is known to have made the 12-mile trip from the Potomac River to Ball's Mill, the uppermost point reached by the navigation, in 1854. The Little River branch to Aldie, the intended head, was never completed. By this time the former Washington and Old Dominion Railroad was making inroads into this part of northern Virginia. Consequently, the navigation company was dissolved in 1857.

Historian: Dr. William Trout, with review by John G. Lewis (both members of Virginia Canals and Navigations Society, Alexandria, VA)

Prepared for transmittal by: Eric DeLony, Chief, HAER; Isabel Yang, HAER architect, and Holly Chamberlain, historian.
Transmitted to the Library of Congress in March, 1988.